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FloorPrep
Legislative Digest

Wednesday, February 14, 2001

The House will meet at 10:00 a.m. for Legislative Business.

Anticipated Floor Action:

H.R. 554—Railroad Passenger Disaster Family Assistance Act
H.R. 559—Designating the ‘John Joseph Moakley U.S. Courthouse’
H.R. 524—Electronic Commerce Enhancement Act of 2001



Bills considered pursuant to a rule:

Floor Situation: The Rules Committee met on Tuesday evening, February 13, 2001 and granted an open rule that provides one hour of general debate equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. The rule also allows the bill to be amended by section, with priority being given to Members who have their amendments preprinted in the Congressional Record. Finally, the rule provides one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

H.R. 554 establishes a formal system to provide assistance to families of those involved in rail passenger accidents. The system applies only to accidents within the United States involving interstate inter-city rail carriers or intrastate high-speed rail carriers. It does not affect accidents involving tourist, historic, or excursion rail carriers. The bill directs the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) to assign a director of family support services to assist the families of passengers involved in rail accidents by serving as a federal government contact person and acting as a liaison between the families and the rail carrier. The bill also requires the NTSB to designate a nonprofit organization to provide counseling and other support to the victims' families. In addition to mental health services, this third party will provide a private grieving area for families and help arrange accident victim memorial services.

H.R. 554 directs passenger carriers to develop a rail accident response plan. The bill outlines response plan guidelines and requires rail passenger providers to have their plans in place within six months of enactment. In addition, any rail passenger carrier involved in a major accident must provide a passenger list to both the NTSB and the designated third party organization. The rail

carrier will not be liable for damages resulting from list disclosure. In addition, the bill prohibits attorneys from soliciting victims' families (excluding rail employees' relatives) for 45 days following the accident.

H.R. 554 was introduced by Mr. Young and not considered by a committee. However, a substantively identical bill, H.R. 2681, passed the House under suspension of the rules on October 4, 1999, by voice vote. CBO estimated that implementing H.R. 2681 would have cost less than \$500,000 a year.

Bills considered under suspension of the rules:

Floor Situation: The House is scheduled to consider two bills under suspension of the rules. Each is debatable for 40 minutes, may not be amended, and requires a two-thirds majority vote for passage.

H.R. 559 designates the United States courthouse at 1 Courthouse Way in Boston, Massachusetts, as the "John Joseph Moakley United States Courthouse". Mr. Moakley has represented the Ninth Congressional District of Massachusetts for the past thirty years. He has spent most of his adult life representing the people of Boston in one way or another and before that, his country during WWII in the Navy. After graduating from law school, he was elected to the state House in 1952 and then to the state Senate in 1964. Following his state service, he was elected to the Boston City Council in 1971 and finally, to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1972. During his many years in Congress, he has championed issues ranging from investigating the deaths of several priests and nuns killed in El Salvador to more parochial issues such as the cleanup of Boston Harbor. Mr. Moakley also served as Chairman of the Rules Committee from June 1989 until 1995. On Monday of this week, he announced that he was not going to seek a 16th term in the House because he has been diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukemia. This measure was introduced by Mr. McGovern and was not considered by a committee.

H.R. 524 promotes electronic commerce in small and medium-sized businesses by identifying the challenges facing small businesses and establishing a program to assist them in overcoming obstacles as they enter the age of electronic commerce. Specifically, H.R. 524 requires the Director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to establish an Advisory Panel to report on these challenges in integrating and utilizing electronic commerce technologies and business practices. The final report must include: (1) a three-year plan for NIST's Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) program in the field of electronic commerce; (2) recommendations to addressing interoperability issues in electronic commerce; and (3) requires the MEP to establish a competitive grant program pilot program to assist manufacturers and businesses in integrating and utilizing electronic commerce technologies and business practices.

H.R. 524 was introduced by Mr. Barcia and was not considered by a committee. However, H.R. 4429 (which is identical in text to H.R. 524) passed the House by voice vote on September 26, 2000. CBO estimated that implementing H.R. 4429 would have cost \$10 million over the 2001-2005 period.



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